Civil War Letter Gives View of Soldier's Life

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By DOROTHY J. CLARK

In the early years of the Civil War, local resident Will St. Clair wrote a letter back home to his cousins, Hattie and Lib. His notepaper was decorated in blue with an eagle flying over the head of George Washington with the words: "First in War, First in Peace, and First in the Hearts of his Countrymen."

Writing November 8, 1861 from Camp Calhoun, Tenn., young Will was still not far from home, nor had he seen much of the actual war that he was to experience later.

"Dear Cousin Hattie — I received yours of the 23rd and was truly glad to hear from you, but I am sorry that I've nothing of any importance to write to you. There is considerable excitement here. The people are coming to us from all quarters for protection. The rebels are driving them out of the country. There was 300 come last night, women and children, and the rebels are committing all kinds of depredations on the citizens and stealing everything they can find, but we will stop this in a few days. We sent out 200 cavalry this morning and we will go next.

"We left Henderson last Friday and it rained all day and night and we had a hard time climbing over the mountains and hills. We were two days coming 35 miles but we have got a beautiful camp here. It is on the top of a high hill on the bank of Green River. There is a Secesh town on the other side of the river but they all left when they heard we was coming except what few Union people there was there. That old fellow that we took the tobacco from has left home and gone in the Secesh army. We took two steam boats from the rebels. We are using them to carry the mail from Evansville up here to us. We are 95 miles right south from Evansville. You wanted to know whether I had written to Thirze or not. I've written two and got one answer. I believe I've written all I can at present. You must write and tell the rest of the folks to write. They all wait for me to write first. I got a letter from Brad the other day. He is learning the tinner's trade at town. Direct your letters in the same way that you did then they will come to me where ever I am. (signed) Will St. Clair."

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The second half of this Civil War letter was addressed to his Cousin Lib. "I will try to write you a few lines. I have written a letter every day since I been here and I am about out of any thing to write. Soldiers life is easy and very hard in some respect. I am very well satisfied in the service of my country and would be if it was as hard again, although home is dear to one that has a happy home. But I never expect to see home until peace is restored to the Union.

"I would not be satisfied if I was there and my friends gone and me at home neutral if the war lasts ten years. My mind is now that I will stay unless it is my lot to fall among the many on the battle field. We have plenty to eat, plenty for soldiers on the battle field. We have plenty to eat, plenty for soldiers any way. We have bacon and coffee and sea biscuit that is so hard that a wagon can run over them and not break them. We have to soak them in coffee until they get so we can eat them. We have beans some times and beef when we get them. We have a feast and potatoes.

"Well, Lib, I have to go to dinner and I will have to quit writing. You must write again soon. Give my love to to the best looking girl out there. (signed) Will St. Clair to Coz Lib Carico."

According to St. Clair family records, William St. Clair was born Dec. 9, 1843, the son of Nelson St. Clair and Eliza J. Beard, early settlers of Vigo and Sullivan counties. He died at the age of 74 years, at the home of his sister-in-law, Mrs. Harry Blouch, of Terre Haute. He was survived by the widow, Docia Fowler whom he married in 1868 and three sons, William, Eugene and Sylvester. He also had one brother Sylvester.